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Northern France
(25 Jul - 14 Sep 44)

The part played by the 11. Paratroop Corps in Northern France

20 July till 11 September, 1944.

By

General Eugen Meindl, of ~~the 11. Paratroop Corps~~

General der Fallschirm-
truppe a. D.

Trans. note: The strong expressions and slang terms occurring herein are those of the original writer. The translator has merely - as he believes - faithfully recorded these.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
SPECIAL STAFF, UNITED STATES ARMY
WASHINGTON 25, D C

12923

12 July 1949

Note to: MS # A-923

By: Kenneth W. Hechler
Major, Infantry (Res)

At the end of October 1945, when Captain Merriam went to London with various questions from members of the ETO Historical Section, he brought along a series of questions from the "Cobra" Section concerning the operation of the II F.S. corps in Normandy.

In my oral interview with General Meindl, which was a joint oral interview along with General Schimpf (see ETHINT 78) I recall distinctly that General Meindl took a rather light hearted attitude toward the issues presented to him. It is evident from his written report that he is deliberately attempting to be funny rather than necessarily to be accurate in his report. Therefore, although his report really is funny in spots, it has to be taken with a grain of salt and the tactical statements thoroughly checked with German documents and other commanders in the area.



General E u g e n M e i n d l
of the paratroop formations;

No. 11 P.o.W. Camp,
Bridgend, 20 April, 46.

In command of the 11. Paratroop Corps.

The part played by the 11. Paratroop Corps in Northern France
20 July till 14 September, 1944.

Report: Headquarters U.S. Forces, European Theater, Main, O.P.O. 757.
18 March, 1946.

Re: My report on the period from 26 July to 6 August, 1944 as asked for
by Headquarters U.S. Forces, REAR A.P.O. 887 on 26 October, 1945. Handed
in by me on 3 January, 1946,- and my report Part 'I' on Normandy on 18
April, 1946.

Preliminary Remarks. The contents of 'Prefatory' in Part '1' are valid also for
the present Part '2' and likewise later for Part '3' (Rhineland). Dates and
numbers in Parts '2' and '3' are much less clear in my memory, since everything
moved at such a tremendous pace; individual sectors were in many cases held for
no more than a day or two and in consequence I was only able to gain an impression
of the lay of the land and of frontal conditions, in some instances, of only a small
sector, as I could not be everywhere at once. And if I have ventured to quote def-
inite dates I do so only on the understanding that in many cases they will be out
by several days. There are only a very few dates for this period which I am able
definitely to establish, but I am sure of the 19.,- 20.,- and 21 August. And I
would emphasise once again that I am no writer and have no intention of trying to
win a putty medal for detailed description; I would only stand good as an officer
for my faultless soldiers, in order that history will faithfully reflect their
behavior and fighting qualities. I cannot believe that a conqueror will set any
value on proving that the battle was an easy one for him. It is quite certain that
the 11. Paratroop Corps did not make the task of the conqueror any easier, and I do
not believe that our fierce but fair methods of fighting will furnish any excuse
for stamping us as 'criminals', this would only tend ^{to} ~~the~~ diminish the quality of the



conqueror's victory. I am ready, therefore, to step forward at any time and vouch for the bravery of the troops under my command, taking full responsibility for what I might say. Following my fundamental principle 'Save as much blood as you can' I went as far as my concept of soldierly honor would permit and many - not only a few - owe their lives to me. And if it is true that here and there I have had hard things to say about this or that German operation I insist that this is not blackheartedness on my part but only a recognition that even a great military nation has to obtain experience, if only to confirm ^{conclusions} ~~results~~ long known. And anyone bearing on his shoulders the weight of two years at the front may be deemed to have learned something during the period of his military life.



2.

The end of July; 1944: (See Sketch No. '1').

The situation on the front of St. Lô in the sector of the 11. Paratroopers had become to a certain extent stabilized by ~~the~~ 25 July. The 12. Reconnaissance Battalion had moved at the right time onto the St. Lô road and gone forward in a southeasterly direction,- just at the time the smaller attacks of the enemy against the St. Lo front began,- with the object of improving the line there.

I had succeeded in getting the 15. Paratroop Regiment, under Major Groeschke, subordinated to me by the 7. Army at this time. The Regiment had already been used in conjunction with other portions of the 2. Paratroop Division in the sector of the LXXXIV. Army Corps and had sustained considerable losses. Major Groeschke arrived on the scene with fewer than 500 men and his troops were assigned to the 3. Paratroop Division as the 4. Regiment, its ranks were filled up,- and it was assigned a position in a sector which for the time being was comparatively quiet.

There was plenty to worry us in these days. Our neighbor on the left was no longer capable of holding on. The reinforcements brought up speedily, as for example the 5. Paratroop Division, had been so torn to pieces and weakened that there was no longer any question of a firm fighting front in the sector of the LXXXIV Army Corps.

It was impossible to make out who was leading whom, and where, or even where the most forward line was located. This meant that the left wing of the 352. Inf. Div. was being threatened more and more, and there were practically no signs of any resistance from our neighbor on the left. I took a good look round in this vicinity myself and made up my mind to withdraw the redoubtable 12. Paratroop Reconnaissance Battalion once again from my own front and use it for the building up of lateral defense for the Corps in the neighborhood of Le Mesnil Herman.

In spite of strong activity by enemy fighter-bombers, I ventured to move the battalion in the late hours of the evening, in single small detachments on motor trucks, through Fervaches to Le Mesnil Herman. The first trucks carrying the troops arrived

in the vicinity of the headquarters of the 152. Inf. Div. shortly before darkness fell, just after the Divisional Commander General Kraus had been shot out of his headquarters with his General Staff and only succeeded in avoiding being taken prisoner by a half²breath, by the enemy tank troops making the attack. Captain Goettsche hereupon immediately engaged the first enemy tanks with the 12. Artillery Battalion's guns. It was only after several of the enemy tanks had been knocked out that the rest withdrew to the woods whence they had come and only then was it possible for Captain Goettsche to bar off the main road before le Mesnil with his troops. So the 12. Artillery Battalion was once again - and for the third time within the hour - the savior of the situation at the last moment. With the assistance of the remaining portions of the 352. Inf. Div. he was able to hold the main road for a day, and it was only when the enemy tanks had encircled it and had shot it out of its foxholes from the South that the battalion started to move back with the 352. Inf. Div. to Lamphaise - le Mariage - la Pivelet. A detachment of the 12. Assault Gun Brigade lent good support to both the Regiment and the Division. From the shelter of our command post we could both see and hear how the battle raged throughout the entire day, although having to be very careful about putting our heads out owing to the presence of the enemy fighter-bombers. The din of shell-fire and the motors of the tanks was so great that it was impossible to talk over the telephone at all. Luckily, the enemy planes failed to see any signs of the presence of a German command post in the apparent heaps of rubble. Everybody and everything not urgently required by me had already been transferred during the previous night to the neighborhood of la Bacenniere, 2 kms northwest of St. Viger. Telephone lines to that place and likewise from there to our neighbors and to the fighting detachments - (the 3. Paratroop and the 352. Inf. Div.) - had been laid by the time night was falling on the 26 July.

At about 14.00 hrs the Commander of the 2. Armored Division, Maj-Gen. von Quettwitz, reported to me. He informed me that his mission was:-

To attack along with the 116. Armored Division (Count Schwerin) under the command of General von Funck on a broad front from the region of the 352. Inf. Div. across the river Vire westward. The middle line of the attacking forces would be through le Mesnil Herman and the object of the attack would be to bite deep into the flank of the enemy tank forces attacking the right wing of the LXXXIV Army Corps in a southerly direction. His 2. Armored Divisional artillery was already located in the sector of the 3. Paratroop Division on the eastern bank of the Vire with its muzzles pointing west-northwest.

I was fully in accord with the idea of support by tank forces but I did not agree with the way the attack by tanks was to be carried out. I explained to Maj. Gen. Luettwitz that at this time we had only very weak forces along the line mentioned previously, on the left wing of the Corps, and were being attacked at the time in greater strength at Ramphaire. I told him it was my intention to move into occupation of the line of le Mesnil - Raault - le Mariage - la Fivolet - la Demsiere during that night and to hold this line, some 3 kms in front of my command post. And this line would be held until the tank attack rolled over it and onward!

But I could promise no useful results from a tank attack on such a wide front. The tanks should first of all aim at taking le Mesnil Herman as the most important goal in the path of attack of the enemy, so as to prevent the latter from gaining further ground in the direction of Percy. An attack with tanks on such a broad front could not hope to succeed and in the daytime would be quite out of the question, owing to the activity of the enemy planes. Percy would in my estimation be the goal of the enemy attack, and it would only be possible for us to make any headway at night time, by gathering all our tank forces for concentrated attack. I said that in my opinion the enemy did not like the idea at all of night fighting. During the day we ought to spread out our tank forces and camouflage them cleverly, thus constituting an antitank front. I insisted it was not possible to fight tank battles here in the same way as in Russia in 1941 and 1942 or as we had done at home on the exercise ground at Deebnitz.



The retort of Maj. Gen. von Luettwitz was: "What are you thinking of? All I want you to do is to see that my right flank is properly secured during attack, and we shall be able to thrust forward in depth".

"We shall hold on and maintain the safety of your flanks... never fear" I replied. "But we cannot be expected to keep up with you and therefore you would have to fight in depth without our assistance and look after the safety of your own flanks. So you cannot attack on a broad front. But there is no hope of an attack in the daytime (if the weather is at all suitable for flying) having any success. If you manage to take le Mesnil Herman alone in the way you want and succeed in holding on to it then I shall call you 'Count Luettwitz'. But if an attack in depth by the Armored Corps meets with success then I shall begin to think you are a witch riding on a broomstick. Where is General von Funck? I should like to talk this matter over with him"

General von Funck was at this time somewhere in my rear section and had travelled on to 7. Army Headquarters for further orders. I myself was summoned thither shortly afterward. I left instructions before departing for the transfer of the command post to Bacconniers- near St. Viger, and then climbed into my 'Jaboflitzer' ('bomber-dodger') a 'People's Car' without turrets, and started off for the headquarters of the 7. Army, some 15 kms south of Percy in the open country.

My conversation with the Commander of the 7. Army: 27 July: 1944.

At about 17.30 hrs I arrived at SS Oberstgruppenführer ^{Hausert} command post and found him there. He informed me that the Armored Corps with General Funck commanding it had already started to move through my left wing in attack against the flank of the enemy attacking Percy, exactly as Major-General von Luettwitz wanted. I did not beat about the bush in expressing my opinion to the commander in chief, the more so as I had just ascertained that the enemy tank spearhead had already come about 8 kms nearer Percy. I expressed my disappointment that the Armored Division under von Luettwitz had not been subordinated to me, in which case we should have been able to attack that same night and would very likely have been able to retake le Mesnil Herman. Two, on

the morning following, it would be too late and as for a breakthrough in the morning on the part of the entire corps it was already too late. I asked that - since it had not been thought fit to entrust the tanks to my care - at least a clear line of demarcation should be drawn between the tank corps and myself, so that I could withdraw my men from the von Luetwitz sector, so as to look after the security of my own western flank. It was an important matter for me - I insisted -- not to lose contact with my neighbor on the right and during a further withdrawal to the right, eastward, I would see that contact was not lost, otherwise the 11. Paratroop Corps would soon be surrounded from two sides and after what I had seen I hadn't much faith in the tanks.

So as line of demarcation the river Vire - from Pentfarcy northward, was decided on in the meantime. The 352. Inf. Div. would remain where it was for the meantime and would be subordinated to the Armored Corps from 24.00 hrs on that day, for the attack. After the attack the division would be withdrawn from the line for reconstitution. The 12. Artillery Battalion and other portions of the 11. Paratroop Corps could be withdrawn that night, provided that the withdrawal was ensured by tank support. In place of the 352. Inf. Div. a new Army (Heer) infantry division would be allotted to me within the next few days. And in the leadership of the LXXXIV. Army Corps a change would be made; Maj.-Gen. von Keltitz would be replaced by Maj.-Gen. Elfelt and the Chief of the 7. Army - General Ponsel, would be replaced by Col. von Gersdorff of the General Staff.

On being thus informed, I asked "And what about me?.... Why am I not being replaced? I failed to hold St Lo. This is the thanks one gets when one has done one's duty to the utmost." "No!"... was the reply. "Don't be vexed..... It isn't so! The Paratroop Corps is the only formation which did and still does hold out. You have done all in your power". "I am not vexed! I am raging!" I replied. The people above us are always trying to catch us formation leaders out in a mistake and we are made the scapegoats for everything that goes wrong although we never fail to point out and shall continue to point out the consequences of the mistakes made by those above us. We paratroopers shall continue to have our own ideas, but our faith

in our superiors has now gone to the Devil! You your self, Herr Oberstgruppenführer, know very well how I have been pointing out for weeks now the mortal errors and inadequacies prevailing and how I have prophesied an inevitable catastrophe, and I have done this, too - while there was still time left to change matters. Now, a breakthrough by the enemy into the heart of France is absolutely inevitable and you and I know what that means! I shall now withdraw the 12. Artillery Battalion behind the 3. Paratroop Division as soon as the tanks have moved into the position and I give up with a heavy heart the 352. Inf. Div. hitherto subordinated to me and tomorrow morning I shall transfer my command post behind the center of the 3. Paratroop Division!

The Commander in Chief agreed to this and I left and started off - that is to say - I tried my best - to get back to my command post, but I was 'strafed' unmercifully on the return route by the enemy fighter-bombers. I had to dive out of my car and take cover more than thirty times on the way. It was not till darkness was falling that I arrived back at the command post which had just been set up at Bacorniere. It was in truth a very hard day for a troop leader - a day I shall not easily forget.

On my arrival, I found Major or Lieutenant-Colonel von Kluge, son of Field Marshal von Kluge, along with the Chief of the General Staff. He had been waiting for some considerable time. His father was in the habit of sending him from Staff to Staff as what he called a 'front traveller' but what we in our way of speaking called a spy, with the object of collecting his impressions for 'the old man' (this is what the German original says. Trans.) - and I was just in the right frame of mind to tell a man who was not only a spy but who had not the foggiest notion of the real conditions at the front what my opinion was!

So I said to him... "Please tell your father that things have now reached such a pass that it is no longer possible to hold on to Normandy, as the troops are by this time completely exhausted. This is all due to the order to hold on in hopeless positions. And yet we are still being ordered 'to hold on'! The enemy will certainly



new break through on our West and overtake us. And what do we do then? Everything will depend on the efforts of a couple of tank divisions! I tell you here and now that nothing - absolutely nothing, will be achieved by the tank divisions if they follow the same methods as hitherto! It would be far better to use them for building up an antitank defense, instead of throwing them away on imaginary goals as in tank maneuvers on a map! We in Normandy have experienced what it is like to lie under the flail of a fabulous air superiority. There is no chance now of achieving anything at all except by attack at night. The tank attack scheduled for tomorrow morning will serve no useful purpose whatsoever, for it will be made on too broad a front and cannot be started until dawn is beginning to break. That is only my own personal opinion, I admit, and we paratroopers don't know anything about tank warfare! And now they've taken the 352. Infantry Division away from me, on which the whole supply and provisioning of the Corps depended and still depends! So please tell your father all I have said to you".

The younger von Kluge was completely taken aback! I knew I said a lot more into the bargain but I cannot recall every word I spoke. But I felt that I had to unburden myself at last, and I did so!

At about 22.00 hrs General von Funck arrived in and gave me an explanation regarding the attack of the tank corps. He enquired also about the methods of fighting of the enemy tank formations. I explained to him that in the event of an enemy tank attack the intervention of the enemy air forces - although I did not claim to know anything about tank fighting- would play the decisive - or at least a decisive - role.

The enemy planes would form a species of bell made up of fighter-bombers, which would move in front of the tank spearheads and flit from sector to sector, and behind this the tank spearheads would follow. Any resistance put up by us would not only be pounced upon gleefully by the enemy planes but would be smashed with relish by the enemy tanks. The role of the enemy fighter-bombers was not merely a complementary one but in point of fact rendered quite superfluous the 'fire-bell' formed by artillery shells known to us. This was my opinion.

And since the fighter-bomber not only carries out reconnaissance but immediately thereafter takes its part in the fighting we should have to have extremely good camouflage and show an apparently empty battlefield, two conditions not very easy to fulfil for tanks ! And further, as enemy activity in the air had been more lively that day than it had been for some time on our left wing and had been kept up right till darkness was falling it could safely be assumed that...his center of gravity had been located here and that he had almost certainly long since discovered both the arrival and moving into position of both tank divisions ! And so far as a tank attack by daylight from our side, was concerned I had no faith in such an action at all! And I did not forget to stress this point. I requested that the 352. Inf. Div. be released as quickly as ever may be, as the men in it were simply at the end of their tether and no longer possessed the slightest fighting value. I myself, - I said - would be transferring my command post in the morning to behind the center of the 3. Paratroop Division somewhere in the vicinity of St. Martin Dou.

At about 90.00 hrs I was rung up by Maj-Gen. von Luttwitz and informed by him that he had already attacked on a broad front and had just received a report that his most forward elements had 'already' reached the line south of le Mesnil - Raault - le Mesnil - Opac - Mayen, in mobile attack and 'things were going well'.....

"I believe you"... I replied. Let your troops be handed on, - forward of this line there are still portions of the 352. Inf. Div. and the 12. Artillery Battalion in position, - waiting patiently to be relieved by the tanks. You can safely venture to push your attack forward on to the heights of this security line with success. We ourselves have held on to this line so far. However, so far as I see things the most important thing of all is to take le Mesnil again for the enemy is increasing the weight of his attack all the time southward - in the direction of Percy.

Towards mid-day.... no word having been received from the tank formations, at the instigation of my Chief of Staff Colonel Blauensteiner, I rang up General von

Luettwitz again and 'playing dumb' - asked quite innocently how the tanks were getting on..... I know, of course, that something had gone wrong because no 'special announcement' had come through. In a noticeably chastened tone of voice Maj.-Gen. von Luettwitz informed me that he has been forced to give up the attack as it had proved impossible to make any headway in face of the overwhelming superiority of the enemy in the air.

He had..... so he informed me.... moved into our line and was holding it in cooperation with the 352. Inf. Div! The assault guns of the 2. Paratroopers had successfully beaten off an enemy attack! (They were under the charge of the capable Serjeant-Major Grunewald of my old regiment).

I asked that the assault gun detachment be handed back to me, as it had at its disposal the riches of twenty or more assault guns, but I didn't say a word about the tanks. It was only twenty-four hours later that I got them back with the 12. Artillery Battalion, after they had rescued the tanks from more than one critical situation, their crews knowing what was meant by the word 'fighting'. These tank people had failed to exploit properly the Normandy landing. If they had done as we always did and reconnoitered, on foot first of all, the way for the assault guns and tanks, and if they had then stolen forward like Red Indians with these weapons right up close to the enemy they would have been successful too. Of course, they would have had to get off their 'gasoline wagons' but that was something which had never occurred to them and anyhow they wouldn't have done that, for of course it was not pleasant going in the firing zone. It was much safer to 'bob down' and shut the lid. And with the enemy fighters as vigilant as they were they stopped wandering around without any reconnaissance and leaving tracks behind at that! This meant that they weren't sure just what they were supposed to be doing, - they felt themselves in an inferior position, and so the most of them did nothing at all. And if one asked for something from these superior people then there was sure to be something not in order or else not there. It was only when the word 'retreat' reached their ears that they all started forward with alacrity and of course got in one another's way and blocked the road!

what our assault guns had performed with such splendid efficiency right to the inglorious end the tanks could have done for us on 17, if their great mobility, but only a few of the tank commanders had the insight to see - or could be convinced in discussion, that the concept of the great tank battles - for us - was past ! They now had to wake up from a beautiful dream !

But there was a lot worse to come yet !.....

The 352. Inf. Div. was withdrawn a day or two later, - after Percy had been lost. I don't like to think of this period now. Its Commander, Maj.-Gen. Kraic was killed while travelling to the rear in a tank on the day of the withdrawal, - somewhere in the vicinity of the town of Vire.

That afternoon I transferred my command post to a farmhouse some 1,500 meters west of St. Martin Dou, a place with a good view over the sector of the 3. Paratroop Division. The 12. Artillery Battalion made its way to the rear during the night and was declared a Corps reserve for the meantime.

From about the 28 July to the 6 August (Sketch No. '12').

With regard to events during this tragic period I would refer the reader to my report, written and handed over in January in Camp '1'.

In my capacity of Commanding General I had at this time only the 3. Paratroop Division with four regiments - the 5., 8., 9., and 15. - along with the Corps detachments, under me. And the regiments, as well as the 12. Artillery Battalion, were only up to about 50% of strength..... heavy weapons and artillery perhaps 75%, but with a pronounced shortage of munitions of every type. We had to hoard shells and use every weapon most sparingly. The artillery fire had to be concentrated and directed against immobile targets.

It was perfectly clear to me that I could not afford with these meager forces to allow myself to be drawn into any heavy defense fighting on a broad front, - more especially as I was convinced by this time of the 'senselessness of the whole thing'. I did not want to be responsible for shedding blood needlessly. But the most tragic

feature of the whole sorry business was that it was out of the question to talk openly or frankly with anyone - with the exception of my Chief of Staff Colonel Blauensteiner, who followed my thoughts in everything and shared the inner conflict with me. And as a soldier one had to keep one's innermost thoughts hidden from the men, or the situation would have resulted in a still greater catastrophe than was already clearly beginning to take shape.

From this time on I only conducted a delaying battle with the help of the Corps. It was an expressly forbidden type of tactical warfare, but with the forces at one's disposal it was the only kind that could be carried on. Only there was no real excuse for naming it 'defensive fighting by delaying tactics'.

The worst of all, however, was that as a result of the parlous position of one or other of our lateral neighbors, - either on the right or on the left - we were constantly being forced to do something, and had to make sudden springs to the rear, so as not to be rolled up from the side or even from the rear by the enemy. We busied ourselves a lot to hide from the enemy our real strength and the position of the most forward line, and for the most part we were successful in this. But this unsteady and constantly changing method of fighting only succeeded in further exhausting the lower command and the troops, - physically, as mentioned repeatedly previously. And as all movements had - unfortunately - to be carried out at night-time and the nights were very short at that time we were in the position of not being able to count on time as our helper whereas it was on the side of the enemy all the time, - working constantly for him. And while he pursued us cautiously, risking nothing, - he thus saved shedding blood needlessly on his own side while we for our part were driven so relentlessly by the inexorable march of events that from day to day the crying need for sleep among the troops and lower command became more and more urgent. But I have already referred to the consequences of over-exhaustion, in Part '1'.



The last days of July.

The planned attack on our part through le Mesnil westward, - as could have been foreseen went into the bulrushes' - (Trans..... was a complete fiasco) - On the contrary! Far from our tank attack being a success, von Funck of the tanks was unable to prevent the further thrust forward of the enemy on Percy. True, - when the main road to that place was reached we had a slight breathing space, but my western flank was now gravely endangered. A special messenger arrived now with word that 'tanks had forced their way into Avranches' This meant that the springboard for a leap into France had been put in place. I said to my Chief of Staff....."At last! Now we'll have the enemy air forces at our backs. The British will soon get busy on us".

For us it was a matter of keeping close contact with our right neighbor. A breakthrough at that point would be the end of us! As usual, we always had our noses poked furthest into the enemy! We would now have to secure the line between ourselves and our neighbor on the right (unfortunately also the Army perimeter) - by deep echelonnement of the 9. Paratroop Regiment on the right wing. We had now to din into the heads of every N.C.O. in the entire Corps - even those of the supply columns to the rear - that the link on the right must be maintained. The supply troops would have to withdraw in an easterly direction. The position of the left neighbor and the LXXXIV. Army Corps was not to be maintained.

It was possible, however, that the enemy had in mind to deliver a smashing blow, - as I would certainly have done had the position been reversed -- and with the British attacking with a strongecheloned east flank southward - and the Americans attacking on the west flank eastward with all the forces at their disposal -try to sweep together all our Normandy troops and cut us off, from France. It would still be possible to save part of our forces with the cautiousness the enemy was then showing, by making a heroic effort, but I knew very well that the Highest Command would not be able to make up its mind to this, because then - its own failure would be the more evident

to all eyes. It was now once again the time - perhaps the last moment..... for taking a tremendous decision, so as to be able perhaps to put up a longish resistance at the line. If only the nights had not been so terribly short!

However, to spend time wishing for this or that was useless..... Those up at the top were apparently still waiting for a miracle to happen - a miracle which was to be performed by a couple of tank divisions, and were busy talking one another's heads off while the leadership and the formations were melting away. On top of all this, our propaganda announced the attempt of the 20 July and its consequences. So it was up to us as paratroopers to see that our honor was not besmirched! The world was set on our destruction..... Good! We would still hold on to our blunderbusses.

Of course, I could only express myself in this way to my Chief of Staff! However, in different terms I gave my opinion to the Commander in Chief, SS Oberstgruppenführer Hausser, and if I did not use exactly the same words I nevertheless made it quite clear to him what I thought. A day or two later I rang up my neighbor on the right - General Straube of the Infantry, - or rather, I tried to. I was only able to get in contact with his Chief of Staff, Colonel Zoeller. I told him in conversation with him that my neighbor on the right made rather an uncertain impression on me, so far as maintaining the link between our two forces, and added that it seemed to me that insufficient preparations had been made for the possibility of an enemy breakthrough. I recommended, therefore, that at least somebody should give thought to the possibility of sealing off such a breakthrough. I said that from our observations it appeared that the enemy was thinking of making an attack very soon.

Instead of going into the matter, this Chief of Staff rang up the Commander in Chief in the West immediately and gave him a report of 'my fears'..... 'that we should hold on in face of the enemy and not keep casting glances backwards to the rear.' Before another ten minutes had passed the line was cleared for Field Marshal von Kluge to speak to me on a 'command blitz call' and I was given a thorough dressing down for expressing such an opinion..... 'You must hold on as told to, it is an



order of the Führer... and so on, and so on..... other... critical case for you. I hung up on him. At any rate, I thought that my corps had been the only one to succeed in preventing a breakthrough - and that again and again. When Oberstgruppenführer came to see what was happening, I told him that I thought the way von Kluge had permitted himself to talk to me was unworthy of the dignity of a General and I said I was not going to take that from anybody..... not even from a demigod.

We both started then to talk about the position at Avanches... he talked of the possibility of another counter-attack by our tanks. I, however, felt the very gravest doubts about this, as in my experience the only time the tanks could be depended on to put on a spurt was when they were retreating.



30 July or 31 August (?).

The advent of the next day brought with it an end to speculation concerning the situation of my neighbor on the right. I believe it was the 126. Inf. Div. The fereneen brought a heavy artillery barrage on the heads of our neighboring troops on the right and on the right wing of our Corps. The 126. Inf. Div. received a thorough pasting with bombs twice before mid-day and we told ourselves that the party was about to commence. The 9. Paratroop Regiment behind the right flank reported to us that there was not much left now of their right neighbors, the men had lost their heads and didn't know what they were doing; the British had now come forward a further 3 kms and were standing now up against our flank. So I ordered that the 3. Paratroop Division should withdraw as soon as darkness fell to some three or four kilometers from the Rorigny Front into the general line of the formations, - the 9. Paratroop Regiment would secure the movement by forming the flank defense west of Guillerville and Fouquerie, - the 12. Artillery Battalion would secure the movement northeast of the bend in the river Vire at Seurdeval (Hill '204'). The encirclement on both sides of the Corps on the 30 July was rendered more and more threatening by the attack of the British against the 126. Inf. Div. and by the American attack and push through Percy. My neighbor on the right, - General Straube - assured me that the situation would be stabilized by an attack of the 21. Armored Division, under Maj.-Gen. Feuchtinger - against the eastern flank of the British, attacking toward the South. I, however, had no faith in the success of a tank push from our side and consequently I decided during the night to withdraw the entire 3. Paratroop Division to the southern bank of the Vire. And now there came a report from the front that the frontal pressure of the enemy was increasing in strength as soon as he had discovered that there were hardly any troops of ours in occupation of Torigny. Our camouflage measures had worked very well. The enemy now started to press forward more strongly than hitherto from Torigny toward the South, - something which could endanger our nocturnal withdrawal. The 5.



and 15. Regiments were therefore ordered that afternoon to give ground before the enemy in the center of the movement, an easy job for our paratroopers even in the daytime in that thickly wooded landscape, and then to strike back against the flanks of the pursuing enemy before dark so as to obtain elbow-room for us to get across the Vire undisturbed. The two regiments on the wings, - the 8. on the left and on the right the 9. Regiment, were to secure the flanks of the Corps by holding on and by means of local counterpushes.

That evening, the enemy was completely taken by surprise by the sudden attack and we were even able to drive him back toward Torigny. More we had not hoped to achieve.

But in front of the eastern flank of the Corps the situation had taken a less favorable turn by that evening. There, the British had penetrated for about 10 kms deep into the completely unsecured flank of the Corps. Luckily, however, the British and Americans had a line of demarcation between their two forces at that point, and here the same 'eyelid' effect as had appeared in our own demarcation lines could be observed. It would have been a perfectly easy matter to cut off the 3. Paratroop Division before the Vire (to the north). A few reconnaissance pushes by the British in weak strength were easily repulsed by the 9. Paratroop Regiment. But of a relieving attack by our 21. Armored Division there was nothing to be seen or heard.

By taking a British patrol armored car 'alive', after its leader - who had been wounded - had been conveyed with his buddies to corps headquarters at St. Martin Dou, we learned that we had the Guards' Armored Brigade up against us and by consulting a map we saw that we had now no chance of achieving anything further after the city of Vire had been taken. This only strengthened my resolve to move the 3. Paratroop Division over the Vire in the night and above all to circumvent a pursuit by the British. We had now to move pretty nimbly, to prevent the sector, with its troops exhausted as they were - from being overwhelmed in the course of one night. Reconnaissance patrols for the movement were carried out late in the afternoon, despite the approaching battles along the front, and the troops crossed the Vire thereafter during



the night. (See Sketch 131).

A weak covering force at the rear on the commanding heights between Mont Bertraud and Beauvriigny secured the front against pursuit, which, however, never took place, thanks to the darkness. On the contrary, the enemy moved forward cautiously on the day following and with trepidation. By dawn, the Corps stood on the southern bank of the Vire with the main body of its troops, in the strong Vire sector. Once again the N.C.O.'s and paratroopers had achieved the almost impossible, and I have to give them full credit for this. Completely exhausted as they were they now managed to build up a makeshift front along the roads as security. But the 12. Artillery Battalion and the 9. Paratroop Regiment had to take over the front south of the bend in the Vire eastward as far as the region of St. Marie, so as to protect our flanks against a British Armored Division (the 11.?) which had thrust forward to this point. So what use was the strong Vire sector which - had we occupied it four weeks earlier, might have been of the greatest service to us and saved us so much?

Both of my neighbors had now been pressed back across the heights in this sector some 5 to 8 kms on either side of me. And although we were used to being in such a situation, again we were threatened with encirclement. I avoided this threat by withdrawing with my troops during the night of the 1 August to the general line of La Graverie - la Bettiere - Landelles et Coupigny. Our command post was transferred to Coulances, and two nights later - to Maisencelles, south of Vire.

2 August, 1944.

I was not able to bring more than a couple of 8,8 cm anti-aircraft batteries to bear against the push by the British armored division east of the Vire on the city of that name. I placed these hard northeast of the city - inside of the triangle formed by Vire - Vandry - la Papillouiere and my mission was to form a defense against enemy tanks even in close fighting. We succeeded in forcing the enemy tanks to make a detour over and over again. No protection by means of use of paratroops was possible before night fell. It was a very critical day for us, all the more inasmuch as an

So armored division whose number I no longer recall which was sent in had only got as far as as the heights north of Comte. This was a chance for the officer in charge of a British tank unit, if only they had known about it !

It was only possible for me, however, to make contact with the SS division by attack, because the enemy - both infantry and tanks - had now trickled through between me and the SS people. But the holding of the city of Vire depended on my establishing this contact, as I had been ordered to do, and as was of vital importance for the survival of the 3. Paratroop Division.

The attack to the left wing of the SS at Courte (Trans..... the writer spells this place name as 'Courte' now although on the last page he spelt it as 'Comte') - was carried out by the 8. Paratroop Regiment in spite of its state of exhaustion, while I spread the 5. Paratroop Regiment out in echelons in the region around Viessaise for the contingency of counterblows. The 9. Paratroop Regiment and the 12. Artillery Battalion moved last of all frontally toward the city of Vire and crossed the heights west and southwest of the place in a rearward direction. Everything went according to program and the crisis was circumvented for us for a few days at least.

About the 3, 4, and 5 of August, 1944 - (See Sketch '4').

Attacks in lesser strength against the city of Vire in these days were repulsed. Our ever-exhausted paratroopers were able to get a little respite. For a few days there had been from six to eight tanks from the Armored Instructional Division with the Corps, without, however, ever having been sent into battle. They were taken from us again round about the 5 or 6 August, although it was at that very time that they would have been of most use. On about the 4 or 5 August a newly formed division of the Army (Heer), under Maj.-Gen. Detling - was brought up, and was entrusted - against my desires - with the defense of the city of Vire. Our own perimeter ran as of 5 August east of Vire, so that we had to move our fighting strip eastward. We were not being spared ! Even when the 12 Artillery Battalion and the 9. Paratroop Regiment were being withdrawn I was able to see that my estimate of my new 'collab-

erater' had in no sense been too pessimistic. These people had no experience of fighting!

We now looked with anxiety toward our west flank, but reflected that the SS armored infantry were in every sense dependable fighters. So the 12. Artillery Battalion was spread out in depth along with the 9. Paratroop Regiment behind the left wing of the division south of Vire, so as to be able in the event of the fall of Vire at least to bar off the road leading to the Southeast. This measure was completed a few days later.

During these days, for the first time during the whole war, a higher officer of the High Command of the Wehrmacht landed in at the headquarters of the Corps. It was General Warlimont (2). He was very excited about the activity of the enemy fighter-bombers, although as a matter of fact the latter had been strikingly quiet for days.. (unfortunately)..... They were most likely busily employed in the region of Avranches at the time. I gave him an account of the situation, and the way everything had developed... sparing him nothing! I told him that we had done everything... but really everything possible to make things easy for the enemy, thanks to the orders issuing in penny numbers from above, and which even at the quickest always arrived at least forty-eight hours too late. Far too little attention had been paid to the voices of those at the front and even less attention had been paid to maintaining the liason with it. It was imperative that officers of the Higher Command of the Wehrmacht should come out frequently to the front line and when they get as far as that - spend at least a week there. In this way we would not have been caught 'between' the deer and the hinges'; the way the Higher Command conducted matters it would be quite impossible ever really to get to know the troops in the front line. General Warlimont shrugged his shoulders and let me talk, changed the subject soon to the question of the attack on Avranches, and shortly after this took his leave. He belonged to the set of toy soldiers into whose hands Fate had placed our fortune!



6 or 7 August, 1944.

On the 6 or 7 August the city of Vire was lost to our right neighbor and we -
 12. Artillery Battalion and the 9. Paratroop Regiment - had the task of barring
 off the roads leading southward. Detling's division has not finished with the enemy
 troops pressing on Tinchebray and Flers. I had moved the Corps command post to la
 Lande,- near Flers.

The visit of SS Oberstgruppenführer Hausser to Corps Headquarters on 6 or 7 Aug.

The Commander in Chief of the 7. Army took a quick look-in at my headquarters, so
 as to give me a brief summary of the general situation. To the East and South of
 Avranches groups quickly thrown together were still holding out at the time. The enemy
 prepared himself to attack and push forward eastward. The situation of the Funck
 armored corps and the LXXXIV. Army Corps - now under the command of Maj.-Gen. Elfeldt -
 was not very clear. A strong tank attack was to be made from our side during the next
 day or two in the direction of Avranches, so as to sew up the hole, I was told.....

I really could not help it.... I had to laugh ! But I felt very sorry for the Comman-
 der in Chief as a man..... "You surely don't believe that would succeed".....

"Well..... What would y e u do ?" "I ?!.... I wouldn't attack at all!

An attack, with the enemy enjoying such complete air superiority could not penetrate
 very far. In any case.... it's at least a week too late to mount such an attack!

I see the situation somewhat differently..... If Straube and myself are heavily
 attacked within the next few days that will mean that the enemy is trying to create a
 starting post for the race to France in the general line - Caen - Vire - Avranches; in
 that case we shall be able to enjoy at least a couple of weeks leave. If the enemy
 doesn't try an attack in strength, and is content to keep us occupied in the center
 with various small attacks, it will mean that he is planning a decisive blow, inasmuch
 as he will press in with strong flanks on the flanks of the forces standing in Normandy-
 re ever then to pursuit with the object of overtaking us,- and cut us all off from
 France. A real 'Gammes' battle' on a grand scale,- with us helping him all we can and



making things as easy as possible for him..... Yes !..... absolutely challenging him to such a battle ! I'll tell you what I would do, if I'm asked to express an opinion..... I would gather together all available tanks, assault guns,- anti-aircraft and motorized units and use them as a deeply echeloned rearward covering force, sending them onto all roads and streets as antitank defense. And under the protection of these motorized covering forces I would move all the heavier elements,- but above all... the 'feetsloggers',- the infantry and paratroop divisions, in long forced marches at night from the present front eastward. And perhaps in this way we might get the main body behind the Seine ! Of course, it would not be possible to do this without sustaining heavy losses from the efforts of the enemy air forces, but in the way we are going now we are heading for a modern Cannae in which we shall be overwhelmed in three dimensions !" No ! The Commander in Chief could not persuade me of the usefulness of an attack on Avranches nor could he make me believe in the likelihood of our holding out !



from 7 to 12 August, 1944.

The enemy now only exerted pressure slowly against our front. We heard about it all from the crews of the supply vehicles - sometimes the news they brought was the truth, but more often it was completely garbled, but we did learn of the success of the enemy in the plains of France. The counter-attack by our own tanks against Avranches was naturally a failure. and the distrust of the troops toward their leaders grew from day to day. This could be noted from the questions asked by my N.C.O's - who spoke to me quite openly on the subject. And again the 11. Paratroop Corps was the one to have its nose stuck furthest into the enemy and it was so from this time onward, - to right and left the danger of encirclement continued to increase. The attacks from the region of Caen gained ground more and more quickly. And to me - at any rate - it was clear that the enemy had chosen the grandiose solution - and meant to cut us all off from France.

My conversation on 12 August, 1944 with the Commander in Chief of the 7. Army.

The Commander in Chief of the 7. Army observed....."Our own attack on Avranches did not win through. On the left wing of our troops the enemy has now complete freedom to move into Brittany and the plains of France. How long single sizeable villages will hold out under the 'fighting commanders' is uncertain. But in any case the main threat of encirclement by the Americans in the South. The British are making strong and successful attacks on our ^eneighbor on the right.... (please excuse pen, paper, and ink; its not the fault of a prisoner of war) - they are moving against and east of Falaise. There is a danger of the 4 and 6. Divisions being cut off. An attempt must therefore be made in collaboration with our neighbors to avoid encirclement by a strong retreat movement in depth carried out at night. Our first destination will be east of the Orne. How far do you think the 11. Paratroop Corps can be expected to get in one night?"

"The retreat itself presents no difficulties to the Corps - provided we are given the gasoline and spare tires which we need so urgently for all our vehicles and if the paths of retreat are clearly defined, because we are now getting a bit cramped for

space?

Approximately the following line of demarcation to our righthand neighbor ^{was decided.}
 Vassy - Conde sur Neireau - St. Philbert sur Orne (the place where my right
 neighbor Straube was located) ← Bazeches au Houlné on the line Flers - Argentan -
 (the location of our neighbor on the left).

The Tank formations (I think they were under von Funck) - would have the mission
 of covering our right flank, at the point where the remains of the LXXXIV. Army Corps
 were withdrawing fighting all the time in isolated groups. "How long"... the Comman-
 der in Chief said to me....."do you think it will take to get behind the Orne?"

I proposed that the withdrawal be carried out in three great night marches.....
 I would move with the 3. Paratroopers and the Corps troops in two echelons rearward.
 (See Sketch '5').....

The first body of troops:

The 9. Paratroop Regiment and the 12. Artillery Battalion, with
 the 15. Paratroop Regiment.

The second: The 5 and 8. Paratroop Regiments.

} with the artil-
 lery and anti-
 aircraft units
 which always
 fought together

The first body of troops would be on the march from the 12 to the 13 August and
 would remain in the position reached by them until 15 August, when they would start
 off again and keep marching until the 16 August. The second body of troops would
 remain where they were while the first body was on the first stage of its retreat
 and would be marching while the latter was at a halt.

On the 16 August the first body would be at a halt near the river Orne and would
 not move off again until the 18 August, when they would attempt to break their way
 out at 22.30 on 19 August. The second body would be halted from 16 to 18 August,
 - and marching rearward by the river Orne at Condehard.

The Commander in Chief agreed to this proposal.



It was an arduous job getting enough gasoline.... the question of providing the vehicles with new tires was never solved. We managed to get the units of the 11. Paratroop Corps behind the Orne with great difficulty. After that the whole plan went to pieces. The batteries were then unable even to change their position..... the supplies promised by the 7. Army failed to appear. They couldn't be brought up in the daytime on account of the enemy fliers, and in the night the roads were so congested that it was impossible then too. It was the tank formations which were to blame for this, - they took up all the available space on the roads without a thought for anybody else and there were only a few roads available. A few days later both the Commander in Chief and myself had a sample of this totally selfish type of unit's behavior, when we attempted to travel back to our new command post further to the rear. The chaos on the roads was already eloquent of the coming catastrophe. The main columns of the 11. Paratroop Corps I myself had been careful to send to the rear of the ~~the~~ danger zone weeks before. But we had the greatest difficulty in getting even the most essential elements on single motor trucks back to the rear. Even the ambulances and gasoline trucks could hardly move through the undisciplined stream of 'semi-soldiers'. And the strange thing was that it was not only large supply columns and repair trucks for tanks which were moving along the roads from the 12 of August onward, - but complete tank units which a few days before were supposed to require repairs before they could be moved !

I discerned already the first signs of an overall panic. But I shall come to the subject of the real and genuine encirclement later on.

By the 17 August the main body of the Corps stood behind the river Orne (east); only combat posts were still holding out north and south of Tourailles, a few guns among them. Neither I nor the Commander in Chief were able to get as far as the new command post on the night of 17 August, on account of the choked roads. So we were obliged to stop with the staff of the 3. Paratroop Division, located just where we had been brought to a halt, and this had its advantages.....

It gave me a chance to see for myself on the spot, - early on the morning of the 18 August - how our flanks were being squeezed in from the North and to proceed accordingly. Unfortunately on this day my new commander of the 12. Artillery Battalion, Captain von Keenitz, a capable ordnance officer and first-rate pilot, was killed.

Corresponding to the retreat movement of the divisions the Corps command post was likewise moved on the 13 August from la Lande Patri near Flers to St. Henerinc. From here it was shifted to Les Reteurs near Putanges on the 16 August; on the 17, it was transferred to the mill one kilometer south of Nocy - about eight kilometers southeast of Falaise, where the staff of the 3. Paratroop Division was located. On the 18, it moved to la Lande, 1,5 kms northeast of Villedieu and south of Trun.

On the night of the 19 August we broke out of the ring of enemy troops and by the night of the same day were at Comdehard.

In the early hours of the 18 August we were given a supply of vehicles; there was a good deal of air reconnaissance. The noise of trucks moving along all the available roads penetrated even to the mill where we were, although it was located in a depression and not easy to reach. Nothing special happened on our own front, but from that of our right neighbor could be heard the din of fighting. There was much noise and confusion in the ranks of the rear echelons and artillery, portions of which streamed into our sector. In our own neighborhood we could hear tank guns firing from the direction of Nocy and le Mesnil Guerard. Further to the East we could recognize the sound of infantry and strong machine-gun fire mingled with artillery reports. There was some routine reconnaissance in the air above us. ~~Overhead~~ Maj.-Gen. Schimpf to move his command post further south, nearer to that of the Corps. I then got into my 'bomber-dodger' and took a road at an early hour which the Commander in Chief had told me about, - through the woods to Montabard, and ordered the Corps Staff to move from the post they had set up there on the previous day to la Lande, - to a group of farm buildings nestling in a hollow, some 1,5 kms northwest of Villedieu les Bailleul. Our radio post I ordered to move to about 1,5 kms north of there.

The command headquarters of the 7. Army was set up in a quarry at Villedieu, as we ascertained later when the connection with them was re-established. Not only the troops but also the command posts were all squeezed together inside the ring of the enemy troops. There was still one road free at this time - from Trun to the North-east - but it was unfortunately completely dominated by the enemy fighter-bombers.

Since early morning of that day the motorised troops were raising clouds of dust and pushing against one another on the congested roads. It was enough to make one tear one's hair and ask oneself if the drivers had gone off their heads completely and were hastening to place themselves in the view of the enemy planes as targets until they went up in a blaze! There was hardly any anti-aircraft activity on our side. Unlike us, the Army people did not let fly at the enemy planes with rifle and '42' machine-guns, which we had done very successfully in the past. The first thing I did now was to establish a circle with a radius of 1,000 meters around my command post, so as not to be betrayed by the troops gone completely wild. The most varied of marching groups now overtook one another and got hopelessly mixed up together. After eleven years as a front officer I had been through some very peculiar adventures but the formation of the encircling pocket of Falaise on the 19 and 20 of August will always rank among the most dreary memories of my not uninteresting life as a soldier. It is only in such a situation that one finds out who is really a soldier and who only a militarist, - who belongs to the brave and who to the bosses and cowards - and even - traitors!

That afternoon I looked up the Commander in Chief at his command post in the quarry. Here, the first thing I learned was that the Reich's SS Armored Division and several others had already been sent to the rear to lend us a hand! From the outside! In other words.... we were good enough to be left inside the ring! I put a black mark in my mind against the Commander in Chief for this but I kept my thoughts to myself and contented myself with the announcement that with us, everything had gone off according to plan but that we hadn't a drop of

gasoline left in the tanks of the mobile artillery and so it couldn't change its position, and if the ring was drawn tighter the guns would have to be blown up and the heavy gear left behind. Hereupon the Commander in Chief remarked: "The tank units are constantly being pressed further back into the woodland north of Argentan. It is hoped to hold on to the wood." To this I replied: "The most immediate threat seems to me to lie in the North at the moment, from the direction of Falaise, the sounds of battle are increasing in intensity there. I shall send some of the remaining members of the 12. Artillery Battalion to reconnoiter to the Northeast. A truck from the Oberquartiermeister's department which has just arrived with supplies of 'ammo' has brought the news that there only remains open one solitary road, but that there are no troops available to bar it off to the enemy!"

Towards evening the 12. Artillery Battalion reported that the enemy was moving forward against Trun. No pressure was being exerted along the Orne, and the advanced combat posts were even still on the west of the river.

Towards evening the fire of the enemy artillery began to increase in intensity; harassing fire was sent against the command post from three different directions. It let up during the night. Traffic on the roads became if possible thicker. Vehicles were still trying to make their way eastward. Some of them might succeed in moving by using farmcart roads.

The 19 August, 1944.

The 'flight' from the 'kettle' went on still after it grew light. Very soon one could see, on looking out of the foxhole which every single member of the Corps Staff had dug, - the black mushrooms appearing, a sign that the enemy planes were having 'good hunting'. Whenever we saw a cloud of dust spurt up we could almost have laid bets on how long it would be before the mushroom came up.

At about 07.00 hrs I received a visit from SS Oberstgruppenführer Hausser..... So early?!..... A bad sign!..... We were sitting or lying about still in our foxholes. One look at his face was enough to tell me what was wrong.....

I greet him with the words "Well... the lid's shut tight now! Which means, I suppose, that we'll have to try and shove it up again!" "Yes"... he replies....."That's just what I've come to talk to you about. We've seen it coming for a long time!" "Good... I said.... We'll do it! But h e w -we're to do it I shall decide, nobody's going to tell me how to do this..... (For up till then our suggestions had always agreed).

After reflecting for a bit and making a few marks on my map I put forward the following proposal:-

Proposal for an attack to break out of the ring (See Sketch '7').

1. So far as we had been able to ascertain up till then, there was still a small gap in the ring south of Couleuses and another at Magay on the Dives. We didn't know how things were going at St. Lambert and Chambois. The eastern bank of the Dives, too, had not been reconnoitered. But for paratroopers the river Dive constituted no sort of hindrance.
2. The 3. Paratroop Division would divide into two wedges and without firing a shot would steal forward like Indians with the aid of the compass south of Couleuses - Magay, past the mill 1 km southeast thereof and onto the heights of Condehard, and there they would form a front facing west and keep a gap some four to five kilometers open.
3. To aid this the paratroop regiments would be withdrawn through the ranks of their left and righthand neighbors and move back to position for attack in small groups into the wood here west of Montabard. Rear commandees would stay by the troops withdrawing until early on the morning of the 20 August and then come on later with the covering regiment of the Division.
4. I recommended that the positions on the Orne be withdrawn to the heights of Montabard (Trans. I believe he means 'Montabard') on the night of the 19, so that the divisions here might be able to follow on the heels of the 3. Paratroop Division through their gap at Condehard eastward.
5. The artillery should stay where it was. It should use up what ammunition it had.

during the day and join up as a personnel unit with the rear covering regiment - (presumably the 8. Paratroopers). Single antitank and 8,8 cm anti-aircraft cannon, so far as fuel was available, should be brought along.

6. Only light assault equipment would be carried along. The maintenance sections would follow on later through St. Lambert on the 20 August, most likely.
7. During the attack, not a word was to be uttered, not a glim to be shown, - no noise to be made! No fighting before it grew light. Any resistance, - any obstacles, - were to be gone round. The goal would be the heights of Condehard. Every man was to keep close to his neighbor, - the units would move in rows. Every leader must keep the point of the compass, the goal, and his own particular mission in his own head.
8. I myself would take part in the attack with the most forward patrol company, so as to be able to take fast decisions on the spot. There would be no radio activity - no advance detachments.
9. Our troops would move from the ready position in the wood here at la Lande at 22.30 hrs. If the enemy was not too thickly pressed together.... we should do it, and I recommended the Army Staff to follow on the heels of the breakthrough of the paratroopers.

19 August, 1944.

SS Oberstgruppenführer Hausser was in agreement with my proposal. We decided then and there about the withdrawal of the paratroops and they talked this over with their neighbors, - likewise the withdrawal of the front line and the follow-up on the 20 Aug. The Commander in Chief assigned to me another Army division - (I think it was the 344. Inf. Div.) - which I employed as the third wedge south of the 3. Paratroop Division.

The tank units at Argentan also received an order from the Commander in Chief to break through south of us to the East. They were not to start before 24.00 hrs. A radio message was sent to the SS Armored Division outside of the ring that they were to attack from outside the ring - (east) - in the direction of Trun for the purpose of taking some of the weight off the shoulders of the 11. Paratroop Corps. By means of this our northern flank was above all to be kept free - (this had no effect until about

the evening of the 20 August).

We had to get very busy indeed during the whole of that day. Two hours later all commanders of the 3. Paratroop Division and the 'G 3' of the 344 (?) Inf. Div. had come in to get their orders. The withdrawal was ~~still~~ going on in the front already. Our tired feeling disappeared like magic! Yes... a solemn sort of feeling possessed us.. a desire to show that a paratrooper was not so easily to be taken in the net! The arduous nature of the operation was clear to us all! I expected the greatest difficulty to occur on the eastern bank of the Dives and I thought to myself "If we manage to get through at this point, then we've done it!" In actuality, the encircling ring was now notably thicker and deeper and the critical moment arrived only when we reached the heights of Condehard. Our covering regiment to the rear (the 8. Paratroop Regt.) - was to assemble itself there with its front facing west and await the arrival of the other divisions of the Army on 20 August. (between Trun and St. Lambert). Luckily, on the afternoon of the 19 August enemy air activity immediately above our sector was not very great, the enemy fliers had shifted their center of gravity of attack more to the East...(a bad sign for us). Enemy artillery fire waxed from hour to hour, and the batteries came nearer and nearer. Everything and everybody pressed toward the center of the ring.

After the order for the night attack had been imparted verbally everything was prepared with the greatest care. I got into my 'bomber-dodger' again and went and saw the Commander in Chief and asked him to make sure that in no circumstances would the tanks move off before 24.00 hrs, so as not to alert the enemy prematurely. We should only let fly from our side when it had grown light, and the tanks crews should have this impressed on them; they would hardly have sight of us at all the whole time. Also, it was of great importance that the other divisions and formations should keep in close touch with the rear covering regiment, so that the connection would not be split!

At about 18.00 hrs the relieved infantry units arrived in loose formation in the assembly region. They had a few hours sleep and were given food again at 21.00 hrs.

Not a man was allowed to go near the fringe of the wood in case he might be spotted. Groups of men were arranged here and there to bar off the roads, the maintenance columns were collected and were told what their part would be. The position and their various missions were discussed with the leading officers and N.C.O's.....light assault packs made up. The mood of the paratroopers was excellent, I had seen nothing but glowing eyes the whole day through; they knew what it was a matter of!

At 22.25 hrs completion of assembly was reported. At 22.30 hrs the first patrols glided forward like shadows into the dark night. They had to keep close up to one another so as not to lose touch. The Commander in Chief had come into the assembly area with a small staff and entrusted himself to the cleverness of the paratroopers. I inserted his staff into my group of the Corps Staff at the end of the most forward company of the 9. Paratroop Regiment (Stephani).

At about 23.15 hrs we felt the first directed fire, coming from a tank patrolling between the road from Bailen to Trun and the road '113' (?). As was usual at night time; the cone of fire of the machine-guns lay too high. Luckily, the enemy was only letting off illuminant shells. This enabled us to find the spots not being fired over and creep through. We lost time whenever a star shell lit up the landscape, as of course we had to lie low until it got dark again. The enemy artillery had grown a bit alarmed and were pinging the area where we had been a short while before with shells, although by this time only the 8. Regiment was lying low there in foxholes. And as we were now close up to the enemy tanks we were no longer interested in the artillery fire, we didn't think they would be likely to fire on their own buddies. We made a detour, only to come up against other enemy tanks after having moved a distance of about 300 ms in a small hollow. Again we turned aside, this time to the South.

We came up close to where the enemy was letting off well-placed fire with 2 cm. cannon, and the Commander of the 3. Paratroop Division near me was badly wounded in the leg.

4. After the Division had been fed and cared for I took over command of it.

Owing to the number of groups which had to join together, and partly as a result of Maj.-Gen. Schimpf being wounded, the 9. Regiment had lost touch with the others.

So the Commander in Chief and myself, along with about 20 men, went off on our own along with his little group. "We shall find the others at the river Dives" I said to myself. We crept through innumerable hawthorn hedges covered with barbed wire and dodged around some tanks at the roadside, arriving at the river Dives about 12:30 hrs.

While looking for a fordable spot we ran up against Stephani again, who had found a shallow spot south of the mill mentioned previously. It was a nasty job getting the whole crowd across the stream without lights, noiselessly..... The eastern bank was covered with blackberry trailers and was steep into the bargain and the enemy

tanks were standing just behind the bushes.... three of them standing on a little mound, clear against the sky. And now we tried to steal past them to the South. There was no time to be lost now if we hoped to get past the tanks while it was still dark. I stole round the three tanks with those at the head of the group but suddenly we were discovered by one that we hadn't seen in front of us and its crew opened fire on us at a distance of thirty meters. I threw myself flat on my face with a few of the others in a potato field, while the company of our buddies behind us ran straight into the 'dead corner'. Alerted by the sound of running footsteps - (they couldn't see us in the dark) - the enemy tanks all opened fire on the fleeing Germans but their fire was too high and went over our heads. But now behind us to the right there started a mad shooting match on the part of the enemy infantry, in St. Lambert.

Presumably this was directed at the 344. Inf. Div. which was supposed to cross the river just there. And as the tank fire flew about a meter over my head I crept and crept along with my people, centimeter by centimeter along a deeper furrow in the field, - eastward. Fifteen paratroopers and a first lieutenant among us managed to get back of the tanks. It was the third row we had come through!

We heard the crews talking to one another, they must have been in touch with each other by radio. Then all of a sudden other tanks opened fire; they must have

been standing along the edge of the heights,- to the rear. Their fire was likewise directed toward St. Lambert. I myself saw two of them,- standing at separate houses on hill '117' (the northeast part of the slope). And now I and my men turned off eastward in the direction of Hau de Foulbec (a stream) slinking along the hedges. Behind me, in St. Lambert, the noise of infantry fire increased. A house in St. Lambert caught fire and blazed up,- enabling us to see the lay of the land somewhat.

We moved along the depression formed by the bank of the stream under cover of the trees there and reached the road leading from Hill '117' eastward to a small group of houses. We heard single tanks rolling past. On the bridge over the stream we saw tank tracks, made about three hours previously. We darted across the bridge and dived again into the cover of the bushes,- making for the houses. Here, we came upon some dead horses yoked to shot-up German vehicles, about three days old,- from the stench! Victims of the enemy fighter-bombers !

We had just got as far as the first house in the group when an enemy tank came rolling down the other road from southwest leading to the houses. "A German tank!" my first lieutenant whispered hearsely to me..... "That's no German tank" I snapped back...."As you'll very soon see !" In a minute the tank stopped at the other path leading down to the houses, turned its guns round and started to fire up the road.... tracer trajectory..... so they must have been Britishers! I clambered over a fence into one of the gardens and through it. The buildings had a deserted look.... only a dog barked..... the tank was still firing away. And in order to get back on our compass bearing we had to head northeast. And that meant that we had to go through the cursed stream again! No bridge.... and we had no time to lose ! It was now about four o'clock in the morning and a glimmer of dawn was to be seen in the East. It would seem be light enough for the enemy to take potshots at us. Forward then,- on to the hedges to east and northeast. The shooting behind us came to a stop, but started to increase in intensity to the rear, on the left. It might have been the 15. Paratroop Regiment that was being shot at. It was in the direction of Neauphe sur Dives. And now we came on fresh tank tracks leading from the buildings northward!! So careful!!!

By this time it had grown so light that it was getting clear enough for us to be shot at, - misty... and we felt very warm. All of us.... we had been joined by some other paratroopers by this time..... were absolutely dead beat! We had to plunge in up to the neck for the second time in the water;..... our saviors.... the hedges of Normandy which we had cursed so fluently, had by this time covered us with scratches and torn our clothes to ribbons but so far they had saved us for the 'umpteenth time'.. (.....)..... At about 04.30 hrs I heard the sound of tanks again, moving presumably along the road from Condehard to Trun. The noise of battle on the left of us grew in intensity. But onward!

We arrived at a deep dry ditch a good bit further east, - overgrown with weeds. And now we could see who was with us. A soft, light rain began to fall and enveloped us in its folds. It was very welcome to us! According to the time it was we must have been in Condehard. It was now 05.30 hrs. As the noise of the guns to the left in the rear died away we counted twenty enemy tanks rolling forward from the point where the shooting had been going on and watched them roll past at about a distance of 150 meters along a road toward a small hill beginning to stand out more and more clearly in the growing light, and form themselves into a strong group there. This was 'Hill 252', and it made an impression on me at the time which I shall never forget. The enemy tanks now dominated the whole of the strip along which we hoped to make our attack, ... and I had been hoping a little while back that it was our tanks coming to the rescue 'from outside'. Now we could see clearly that they were British tanks. And to leave no last doubt in our minds the three end tanks turned right in our direction and stopped at the edge of the ditch.

Now we had to lie low without a sound. I gave a sign to this effect. But in a minute we made out that the tank crews were talking Polish to one another! So it was the Poles we had to thank for giving us this nice time!

We lay there for at least an hour and a half under the eyes of the British tanks with Polish crews, not daring to move a finger. By this time it was at least 07.30 hrs.

And at about 06.30, we heard the noise of guns start up again, in the direction where we supposed Condard to be....(we could only make out the gable of a house).....

And now we recognised the sound of our 42. machine-guns. The style of the shooting was also that of my paratroopers. Could it be Stephani's lot? The tank just above us and the two others a little further on started at 07.00 hrs to shoot violently past us on the right in a southerly and southeasterly direction. The noise of the guns grew louder round about 07.30 hrs and I had the impression the fighting was moving eastward but lying as I was in the ditch I might have been deceived.

At about 07.30 or a little later we heard the sound of German 8,8 cm anti-aircraft cannon firing in quick succession, whereupon all three enemy tanks rolled off, - back to the hill where the others stood. So at last we could lift our heads! Now however all the tanks on the hill started sweeping the hedges in the vicinity with a curtain of fire. I marvelled at the amount of ammunition they could afford to use up just to make any enemy soldier keep his head down! We had not suffered any losses yet, but couldn't move very far. At about 08.30 several batteries started to fire on the wood, sheltering us and toward Condard. It had stopped raining and the sun came out.

In a short while there was an unpleasant atmosphere reminiscent of a hot-house in our ditch and among the hedges, which in our state of exhaustion we could very well have done without.

Toward 09.00 hrs the fire of the tanks on Hill '252' grew more violent, - in my opinion it showed a touch of nervousness. On the right - to the South - the fire of our own machine-guns had almost died away. Suddenly I caught sight of some paratroopers moving across a part of the ground lit up by the sun's rays - in attack formation. I put two fingers in my mouth and let out a sharp whistle... as we used to do on the training grounds at home and when they turned their heads in my direction I waved them urgently into the bushes. I heard the voice of the leader of the group call out softly.

"Oh! It's the old boy"..... I damned his stupidity under my breath!

When the tank reached us I handed over to him the care of the paratroopers with me,



whose numbers had now swollen considerably, and enlightened him as regards the tanks on the height, which could not now be attacked frontally. I pointed out the possibility of encirclement to the North..... He was an experienced fighter and he took my meaning at once. He was able to tell me where the Commander in Chief had been and where he now was most probably. But where Stephani's regiment might now be he was unable to tell me. That morning they had assembled some tank units and sent a curtain of tank fire all around them, and only moved back when the antitank defense began to make itself strongly felt.

I ordered him to prepare for an encircling attack northward against the 'tank hill'. I would see that artillery and tank guns were brought to bear frontally. But for this I would first have to go back, so as to get into touch with the officers who would direct it. On the way back I was forced with my few companions to cross a spot without cover, in order to get to the point where the Commander in Chief was and although there were only five of us all told a whole enemy battery turned its fire on us. However, this was a sign that we were the only targets whose presence they were aware of - they hadn't spotted the others! We all threw ourselves flat and acted as if we had been hit, and then..... one by one.... rolled and rolled toward a hedge about 100 meters away, - although this too was under the fire of enemy machine-guns, - coming from the right. But the guns were firing from a good distance away and when we got behind the wall making the hedge they could no longer do us any harm. Toward 11.30 hrs we had got as far as the road from St. Lambert, leading to the West Wall at Comdehard, near Hill '137', and here we came upon the Commander in Chief with the 15. Führer Regiment. Enemy artillery was holding the road under fire but we were able to take adequate shelter in an old bomb crater.

I enlightened the Chief on the situation on the dominating heights and explained to him my plan to take the position from the North. The Chief told me he had made contact with a tank division, which had returned in the meantime to the slopes of Mont Orel and meant now to attempt a breakthrough there. He told me he intended to join in with them and take part in the breakthrough. I.... he said.... was to do all I could to

make the breach wider, so that we could all make our way through. "We shall do all in our power"...I said..... "Our strength has been diminished greatly as a result of the strenuous night attack and the efforts of the previous week. But we'll do it. What's worrying me is how we are to get the wounded through" Etc.... etc.

He allotted to me an amphibious car, so as to render me mobile. At this moment, too, my son came on the scene with a group of infantry, who had succeeded in riding our flank of the annoying machine-gun fire. Two more of our tanks came up, along with great number of stragglers, and these could be used to assist the attack,- the men were parts of the 9 and 15. Regiments. The officer in command of the 15. Führer Regiment joined in the attack, taking his place in one tank.

Both at and inside of Condéhard - artillery fire came at us from three directions the whole day through and at times rose to great intensity. And I noted with chagrin that the continuous stream of vehicles of every type and description from the Army divisions were being handled without the slightest trace of discipline,- just like the first lot I had seen previously,- the occupants with fear in their eyes and cowardliness in their hearts. And although they could plainly see and hear that the enemy guns were sweeping the road and firing toward Condéhard they still pressed forward like madmen toward the commanding heights of Condéhard. I had never seen anything so silly in my life except on maneuvers ! Here one saw the communication zone troops from France, who hadn't known what war was for the past three years. The vehicles were simply sacrificed, although there was plenty of good cover off the roads, even against enemy planes ! It was a pitiful sight..... not to be described in words ! Dissolution and panic ! And in between them my paratroopers,- with contempt in their eyes - fulfilling their duties in an exemplary way ! In tatters.... in many cases wounded....dead beat and starving.... but despite all still carrying their weapons, very often two or three, still on the job, ready to help one another at need..... And this other pack ! displaying nothing but crass egotism and cowardliness ! Many decent men from the Army and the SS, who had lost touch with their own units.... really lost touch... still holding on to their weapons..... came and wanted to join us, saying they

wanted nothing to do with the heap of cowardly curs and 'toc-rags' (as we called them)..
 Unnumbered was the pack of rascals, however, who had no thought in mind other than to dash forward with their hands stuck above their heads, - ready to surrender abjectly ! All they had with them was their steel helmets, bread-satchels, and overcoats, - most of them with a blanket as well. I could tell what they were long before they came near me, - whether they faced me or had their backs turned to me....by their shuffling gait..... their hanging, drawn-in heads..... slinking along always close to the ditches at the side of the road, ready to throw themselves flat on their faces if a grenade exploded 500 meters away from them ! And.... unfortunately..... some officers among them !

How manly, on the other hand..... had been the conduct of the Commander in Chief..... he'd gone through all the ardours of night attack..... often enveloped in heavy machine-gun fire ! Here, - the sheep had been clearly separated from the goats..... the real from the 'phency' soldiers ! An immeasurable contempt swelled in our hearts. I felt burning shame at the thought of the impression such scoundrels would make when they fell into enemy hands..... what an impression they would give of the German soldier ! An impression not justified ! For the first time I now understood how W A R was the worst possible way of breeding the best type of human being... how the best bleed was lost and the poorest retained !

And now, as if by a miracle, we succeeded in taking the heights east of Condehard about 16.30 hrs. Some tanks of an SS division (I believe it was the Reich Division) - had supported the attack from the East. By 17.00 hrs motor trucks were rolling along the curved road eastward. Unhappily, a lot of them were chased by enemy planes and shot up in flames. I was only able to keep a narrow gap free with the few men I had assisting me..... a gap about 2 or 3 kms wide. By taking some prisoners we confirmed the presence of a Polish armored division.

Toward 19.00 hrs we were able to get the seriously wounded out of the ^{potholes} 'pocket' with the aid of a hastily thrown together Red Cross column bearing large white flags with a red cross on them . And so as to ensure that they get through without being

shot at, I forbade all traffic from 18.30 hrs onward. I sent off the Red Cross vehicles recognisable for what they were a long way off - at 18.45 hrs in the hope that the enemy would realise our intention and leave them alone; the wounded commander went off with them too. Not a shot was fired at them and I recognized, with thankfulness in my heart, the chivalrous attitude of the enemy - after the hail of fire which had been descending on our heads a little while before. After the ugly scenes I had witnessed that day, the nobility of our enemies made me forget for a moment the nastiness of it all and I offered thanks in my heart in the name of the wounded. I waited a full half hour after the last of the Red Cross column must have been through, so that there should not be the slightest suspicion in the mind of the enemy that we had taken any unfair advantage. The firing set in again and mounted in intensity, and only died down again with the onset of darkness. This was a hint that the gap was wider than I had believed, - but wider, too - than I could occupy.

The news spread like wildfire inside the ring that there was a way through at Cendehard. A stream of stragglers now swept through the gap from nightfall until the morning of the 21 August. Then, - the traffic dried up completely. Both General Straube and Maj.-Gen. Detling of the neighboring Corps had arrived beside me, having made their way on feet; they wanted to join up with me for whatever was now to occur. I bedded them down in an old tank ditch and told them to get some sleep and I would waken them at the right time. Colonel Liebach had also arrived on the scene with the portion of his regiment which had been fighting the whole day through at the river Dives....at about 01.00 hrs. He gave me a picture of the state of the troops trapped inside of the ring. The majority of them.... even the officers.... had declined to attempt to get out of the trap... they considered it a hopeless project ! I believe he had had to witness worse scenes than I had had to during the day !

I handed over to him control of the remainder of the 3. Paratroop Division. I sent officers off on bicycles into the ring, to let them know inside what was happening and what was now to be expected. And an armored reconnaissance battalion, the covering force of the Armored Division, came up and announced that nothing was following on

behind them. I waited another three hours and managed to get the last of the wounded away, and then I decided to move back with the paratroopers as soon as it grew light, for I knew it would not be possible to keep the gap open for another whole day.



21 August, 1944.

At 02.45 hrs I sent word round to the troops occupying the different positions taken up and - starting from the wings, - we withdrew towards the road. It had started to rain heavily and this favored our intention - namely, - to disappear before it got light. In a short time there was a goodly collection of men, who set some value on an orderly retreat. Colonel Liebach had the job of arranging a proper covering force and then - at 03.45 hrs, we started off eastward. The pouring rain and the sound of the wind drowned any noise from the marching feet. Stumbling, - stopping suddenly, close up against the man in front, there moved a mass of steaming, tired men, like a long serpent moving east-northeast. Now and then we were blinded by the glare of a burning truck, and then plunged into darkness shortly after that with the rain coming down in sheets! My young one and his infantry made up the front with myself, with two of our tanks bringing up the rear, so that we should not be surprised and run down by enemy tanks. Up till 05.00 we kept the gap open, then - when the tail end had come through, it closed again. It was with a heavy heart that I found myself on the retreat at this time. The rain, still pouring down in streams, enabled us to continue our march by daytime.

At a spot some 8 km outside the ring an SS unit - (I think it was the Reich Armored Division) - had taken up a position from the 20 August. When I got as far as this point with my companions I was told that a stream of men without weapons, motor trucks, etc.... some paratroopers too..... had been pouring to the rear all that night;- this was somewhere near Champesout..... An assembly point for the 11. Paratroop Corps was decided on in Orville sur Touque, where they could be collected and sent on ahead.

I knew nothing of the whereabouts of my chief assistants, - my Chief of Staff and my 'G 3' whom I had lost sight of at the tank line by the river Dives, nor of the 9. Regiment under Staphani or the 5. under Becker. After I had rested a bit from the strain of the march on foot and the efforts of the past night I left General Straube

and Maj.-Gen. getting to the car of the regimental command post and got into the amphibious car allotted to me by the Commander in Chief and with a checkfull of companions set off along the Corps' road back to Orville. It was touching to me to see how I was greeted on the road by any of my paratroopers when I passed. It was as if the 'boys' - (as I called the paratroopers) - had no enemy chasing them. Unfortunately, there was no member of a 'propaganda company' on the scene to maintain an honest enthusiasm coming from the heart. I am not ashamed to confess that tears rose to my eyes when I saw this spirit of gratitude glowing in the eyes of my 'boys'. They might look like a pack of ragged tinkers but their glance was bright and proud, despite their exhaustion.

If any of us ventured to sit down for a minute we fell at once into a deathlike sleep, from which we were hardly to be roused. I saw that for myself when my 'young one' and I went round at 02.30 hrs and wakened them all quietly, so as to get ready for the march again. I wakened my son first of all, stood him on his feet, and wished him a "Happy" Birthday, as it happened to be for him that morning, and then got him to give me a hand to wake the others up. The Commanding General himself went round awakening his men!

And it proved such a job to get the men awake that in spite of the downpour both my boy and myself were pouring with sweat before we got through.

Not a glimmer of light, - not the slightest sound, - only a row of men sunk in a deathlike sleep, - with the exception of the two sentries - probably sleeping standing up. It was a really hard job to get them to rouse themselves until we had enough of a company awake to get them to understand what it was all about. I myself was the only one who never closed an eyelid that night, afraid I might oversleep the hour for action. To avoid falling asleep, I kept running round in circles from midnight till two o'clock in the morning, - collecting stragglers who turned up every now and then, - and making them a party to what was afoot. And even then it was only the heavy rain which kept me from dropping off.

In Orville, my Chief of Staff and 'G 3' landed in about mid-day. Colonel Blauensteiner had taken charge at Condhard of the 9. Paratroop Regiment, after Major Stephani

had been seriously wounded and apparently - later - when being carried off - killed.

Any rate, no trace of the brave officer could be found. Colonel Blauensteiner had taken the heights southeast of Condard and got through there shortly afterwards with portions of the 9. Regiment and parts of the 5. Regiment. South of him (the 9. Regiment) - the tanks were attacking in the afternoon of the 20 August eastward, and the Commander in Chief, who was wounded at this time, - was brought out of the ring by their crews. By the evening of the 21, I had managed to collect quite a party of the tired out 3. Paratroop Division in and east of Orville. I established personally connection with the 7. Army and we were ordered to march back to the river Seine in two night marches and - assembled at three ferrying points on the bank of the river, - to wait for transportation to the other side, south of Reuam. An SS armored formation - (I think it was the 'Reich') - again took over the job of covering the retreat.

During the night of 22 August we reached the area of Beaumesnil, southeast of Bernay, then - continuing the march - we got as far as the woods southwest of Louviers. We were shielded by fog during these night marches. The units had to wait to be taken across for several days, there was such a crush waiting to get over. We had no losses at this time but I think other units lost a devilish lot of men.

I myself managed to get across on the 24 or the 25 August with the small corps staff east of Louviers and travelled up to the second echelon of the Corps Staff, who had been sent back to the rear many days earlier. So far as I can recall, this was at Corbie, north of Vermon. From the columns present everything in the way of fighting men, N.C.O's, - weapons, and vehicles was withdrawn, so as to raise a little the fighting ability of the regiments. Heavy weapons were completely lacking, nor could they be procured,..... all the supply dumps were exhausted, and the homeland was not in a condition to send us any more. As a matter of fact the 3. Paratroop Division and the 12. Artillery Battalion had no fighting value whatsoever after they got back across the Seine. There were, however, so many fighting men and N.C.O's present that we could have set up another division after they had been trained and equipped.... if that

had been possible ! I therefore suggested to the Army and the Army Groups that these remnants of the various regiments be conveyed back to Germany as quickly as possible, so that they could be rested and re-assembled and trained, all the more inasmuch as the remaining units were not in a fit state -lacking heavy weapons as they were - to fight a battle with an enemy operating almost exclusively with tanks. And the loss of experienced leaders was grievous !

Finally, by the 28 of August the High Command in the West had got as far as making up its mind to send all units of the 11. Paratroop Corps back to Germany for rest and re-assembly and these in the neighborhood of Cologne and Wahn would be brought up to strength by using the elements of the Paratroopers of the Army High Command. At this time our entire strength would be about 2500 or 3,000 men, of which only about 500 or 600 were fighting men.

Corps Staff and troops rolled off in the direction of Cologne - Wahn on the 29 August. I myself reported to Sepp Dietrich of the Army Group in Rouen, and believed that at least now we would be spared from any further senseless orders!

With the Chief I had to travel over to Nancy, so as to receive orders for the setting up of the 3. Paratroop Division and so on, from the High Command of the Army there.



In Cologne an attempt was made to pick out from the swarm of stragglers, men out of hospital, - and others, a nucleus for the new 3. Paratroop Division. We did our best to collect something dependable in human material despite the great losses sustained by the units. We tried to scrape up enough equipment and so on to fit them out. All such work - which had hitherto proceeded smoothly and fairly quickly - now seemed to make no progress at all. The sacrifice of the last remnants of the 3. Paratroop Division now took a heavy toll of us ! The number of really experienced soldiers we could gather together was frighteningly small ! So far as numbers went the 3. and 5. Paratroop Divisions, along with the troops of the Corps in Normandy and throughout France would have lost about the specified strength of some two paratroop divisions in the battles fought from 6 June to 14 September and on 4 September, 1944, without mentioning the whole of the heavy equipment of two divisions. It might be true that the 11. Paratroop Corps had more than fulfilled all that had been expected of it, but at what a price !!

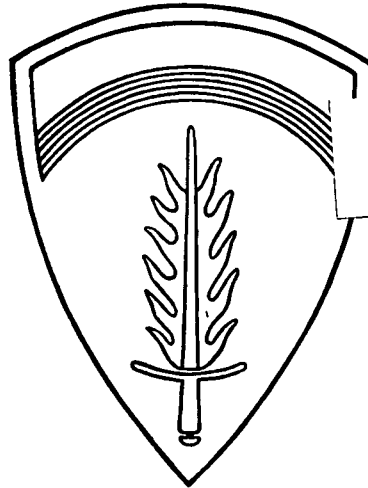
And all this as a consequence of the hopelessly dilettante and completely incompetent assessment of frontal conditions by higher authorities with not the faintest notion of the real conditions reigning there..... a state of affairs for which A l l the highest instances were to blame !

(Sgd.)

Eugen Meindl,
 General in command of 11. Paratroop Corps;
 3 May; 1946.



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